

**Testimony in Opposition to SB 34**  
**Dr. Linda K. Brundage**  
**February 10, 2015**

Thank you all for an opportunity to express my opposition to SB 34.

I am Dr. Linda Brundage. I am a mom, grandma, psychologist and a person of faith and I believe we live in a gun culture. Guns have become our first line of either offense or defense. I am going to start by offering you some context for my opposition to SB 34 and then provide information specific to the Concealed Carry permitting process.

Day after day, we hear of outrageous acts of violence and heartbreaking tragedies: road rage in Howell, a 3 year old in Benton Harbor killing himself with an adult's unsecured gun, a young woman fatally shot on a homeowner's doorstep when she knocked on his door for help. Every day in the U.S., an average of 289 people are shot. Eighty-six of them die<sup>1</sup>, including 8 children and teens.<sup>2</sup> The cost in human lives is staggering. The cost to our economy is significant as well: it is estimated at around \$174 billion per year.<sup>3</sup>

There is no real evidence that more guns make us safer. If anything the presence of a gun, escalates a situation. A simple argument turns deadly when a gun is present.

Over 30,000 Americans are killed each year by guns in America. The United States is the only developed nation that has this problem with gun violence. The notion that guns make us safer is turned on its face when think about this in a global perspective. Americans are 20 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than people in other high-income countries.<sup>4</sup>

Gun violence is a public health crisis in America: Nearly eight American children are shot and killed every day—the public health community has rallied around much lesser epidemics in the past. Anything else responsible for this many deaths would be immediately investigated and regulated.

In many states, including Michigan, the number of gun deaths exceeds the number of motor vehicle deaths. "While motor vehicle-related deaths are on the decline as the result of a successful decades-long public health-based injury prevention strategy, firearm deaths continue unabated--the direct result of the failure of policymakers to acknowledge and act on the ubiquitous and too often ignored public health problem."<sup>5</sup>

Easy and unfettered access to guns by people who should not have them is the problem that must be addressed by our political leaders.

Suicide is the elephant in the room when speaking of firearms deaths. Of the 33,000 deaths in the United States due to firearms approximately 22,000 are suicides. Suicide is the third leading cause of death of people ages 15-24. The majority of people, who commit suicide, had identified mental health problems and a history of some treatment. "How did they get a gun?"—is the important question to ask.

There is a significant relationship between access to firearms and suicide rate. A very good study was done comparing states with the highest gun ownership with the states with the lowest rates of ownership. This

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<sup>1</sup> [http://usnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/01/16/16547690-just-the-facts-gun-violence-in-america?lite](http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/16/16547690-just-the-facts-gun-violence-in-america?lite)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bradycampaign.org/about-gun-violence>

<sup>3</sup> "Shootings Costing U.S. \$174 Billion Show Burden of Gun Violence,"  
<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-21/shootings-costing-u-s-174-billion-show-burden-of-gun-violence>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/files/2012/12/firearm-OECD-UN-data3.jpg>

<sup>5</sup> American Public Health Association,

<https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/fact%20sheets/gundeathsoutpacecardeaths.ashx>

study shows that states with the highest rate of gun ownership also have the highest rate of successful suicides. 90% of suicide attempts using a firearm are successful. Easy access to guns is deadly. There is not much room for re-deciding or waiting another day to see if the darkness lifts if a gun is used in a suicide attempt. It is at this point that a county board could intervene if a person was known to have mental illness but had not been adjudicated and therefore, the background check system would not work to disallow a cpl.

Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "by our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim... We have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes."

Recognized Gun Violence Prevention researcher Daniel Webster clearly states "The best research on the topic of shall issue vs. discretionary concealed carry laws shows evidence that no discretion shall issue laws lead to more gun violence" Removing discretionary authority from local law enforcement will allow dangerous people to obtain concealed pistol licenses (CPLs.). Our local concealed weapons licensing boards made up of sheriff, state police and prosecutors review applicants and can deny a problem person a license. Present law states "If the concealed weapon licensing board determines by clear and convincing evidence based on specific facts that the applicant poses a danger to the applicant or to any other person," it has the authority to decline the application. This authority is important. It saves lives.

**Weak laws regulating the carrying of concealed weapons have also been linked to increased gun trafficking.** According to a September 2010 report by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, laws that deprive law enforcement of discretion regarding the issuance of concealed carry permits are the source of crime guns recovered in other states at more than twice the rate of states that grant law enforcement such discretion.<sup>2</sup>

The American Bar Association has recognized the dangers of weak concealed carry laws. On August 8, 2011, the Association's House of Delegates adopted a resolution expressing its support for laws giving law enforcement broad discretion to determine whether a permit or license to engage in concealed carry should be issued, and its opposition to laws limiting such discretion. [↵]

We labor under a mistaken assumption that Cpl's keep us safe. According to a Violence Policy Center analysis of news reports, CPL permit holders have killed at least 14 law enforcement officers and 622 private citizens since May 2007.

The Michigan law enforcement community has expressed opposition to the abolition of the county gun boards as well. In an article from June, 2014, Terrence Jungel, Executive Director of the Michigan Sheriff's Association said, "We're opposed to the elimination of the board. We like the local input by local officials who live in those communities."<sup>6</sup> In a phone call on February 2, 2015, Sheriff Jungel confirmed that he remains concerned about the loss of local control.

People carrying hidden, loaded handguns in public create unnecessary risks of intentional or accidental shootings. The presence of concealed guns increases the risk that everyday disagreements will escalate into shootouts, especially in places where disputes frequently occur—in bars, at sporting events, and in traffic. Permissive concealed carry laws violate the shared expectation that public places will be safe environments free from guns and gun violence.

The current system works and left in place will not call for additional expense or revenue. Michigan's system works now and denials of CPLs are relatively rare just 1.6% of 82,347 CPL applications were denied in 2011-2012. Licensing board discretion led to 255 denials, just 0.3% of all applications.<sup>7</sup> Local law enforcement often knows persons who are not safe to have a CPL. I am

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<sup>6</sup> "Michigan May Nix the Nation's Only Local Gun Boards," *Governing the States and Localities*, June 30, 2014

<sup>7</sup> "Concealed Pistol License Annual Report: July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012," [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/msp/2012\\_Concealed\\_Pistol\\_Licensing\\_Annual\\_Report\\_434112\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/msp/2012_Concealed_Pistol_Licensing_Annual_Report_434112_7.pdf)

very glad that 255 people were denied a cpl based on the local gun board. We need all eyes on the important issue of concealed carry.

After Alabama after it became a “no discretion, shall issue state” in 2013, Mack and Mobile County Sheriff Sam Cochran estimated that, since the law changed, he had issued 12-18 permits that he would have denied in the past, including cases of:

- Men with multiple arrests for domestic violence charges, but no convictions because the victim did not appear in court;
- People with multiple arrests for other offenses, but no convictions;
- An individual with a felony theft conviction from another state, but who had had his rights restored;
- An individual with past arrests for driving under the influence, harassment, and violating a protective order.

In each case, Cochran noted that in the past, he might have denied CPLs, but under the new law, he no longer had the authority.<sup>8</sup>

Michigan lawmakers should vote against a bill to abolish county gun boards. Recently approved by the Senate, SB 34 would force local authorities to grant licenses to carry hidden, loaded handguns to dangerous people. This bill is being positioned as a way to simplify the process of granting concealed weapons licenses. In reality, it strips law enforcement's ability to deny licenses to dangerous people, forcing them to ignore clear warning signs. A person with a recent history of violent acts, but no convictions. There were clear warning signs of potential danger with George Zimmerman<sup>9</sup> and Aaron Alexis<sup>10</sup>, the Washington Navy Yard shooter; however, they were statutorily eligible for CPLs.

While I support SB 34's goals of creating a more uniform and efficient permitting process, I believe that local law enforcement should retain the discretionary authority to deny permits if they determine “by clear and convincing evidence based on specific articulable facts” that the applicant may be dangerous to himself or to others.

We must find our voice to change the gun culture in the United States.

Let us honor those killed, and save those who will be killed if we fail to act, by rolling up our sleeves and engaging in the hard work of participatory democracy." It is a moral imperative to reduce gun violence. We are all part of the interdependent web of life; any death by firearm diminishes us all.

Thank you for my opportunity to participate in our democracy.

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<sup>8</sup> *Bluster on Both Sides, But Little Change One Year After Alabama's New Pistol Permit Law*, AL.com, August 3, 2014

<sup>9</sup> *"Homicides Committed By Concealed Handgun Permit Holders in Florida,"*

<http://csgv.org/resources/2013/homicides-committed-by-concealed-handgun-permit-holders-in-florida/>

<sup>10</sup> *"DC Navy Yard Shooter Aaron Alexis Had Previous Brushes With The Law,"*

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/washington-dc-navy-yard-shooter-aaron-alexis-navy/story?id=20273287>,

September 16, 2013